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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/05/2017  
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SUBJECT: ROK EMPHASIZES AFGHANISTAN HOSTAGE CRISIS DURING  
DASD SEDNEY MEETINGS

Classified By: A/DCM Joseph Y. Yun, Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The current hostage crisis in Afghanistan dominated the agenda of meetings with Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) David S. Sedney during his

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orientation trip to the ROK on August 2. ROKG officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT), Ministry of National Defense (MND), and Blue House's National Security Council (NSC) urged the USG to continue discouraging the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) from taking any military action to resolve the crisis. They also expressed concern that the hostage crisis could adversely affect the bilateral U.S.-ROK relationship and inflame anti-American sentiment among the Korea public, although both MOFAT and MND stressed that they were working hard to counter such sentiment in the press and the National Assembly. DASD Sedney expressed sympathy to the hostages and their families, reiterated the USG's commitment to provide assistance, and assured the ROKG that the US was fully committed to resolving this issue. END SUMMARY.

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No Military Action  
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12. (C) Across the board, ROKG officials stressed to DASD Sedney that USG assistance to avoid unilateral military action by the GoA was needed. MOFAT DG Cho Byung-je told DASD Sedney that the GoA has been cooperating with the ROKG, but that he sensed that the GoA would prefer to resolve the hostage crisis through military action, a move which the ROKG strongly opposed. The ROKG was trying to exhaust all other possible options before resorting to military action, Cho said. DASD Sedney reaffirmed that the USG had passed that message to the GoA, but emphasized that the USG "does not control the GoA." Cho Tae-young, Assistant Secretary for National Security Policy at the National Security Council, also pressed for the USG to discourage the GoA from taking military action, noting that President Roh was deeply concerned that the hostages would be harmed in the rescue attempt. Countering Cho's assumption that NATO-led ISAF forces controlled the Afghanistan military, DASD Sedney replied that the GoA was a sovereign state and that the Afghan Ministry of Defense made their own decisions with regards to their military. During his meeting with DASD Sedney, MND DG Kim Kyou-hyun received an urgent phone call

reporting that the Afghan military might be mounting a military operation in the Ghanzi province, a call that visibly disrupted operations of the MND officers in the room. Like the other ROKG officials, Kim emphasized that the ROKG did not want a military rescue attempt to move forward.

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WORRIED ABOUT IMPACT ON BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP  
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13. (C) MOFAT DG Cho said he was concerned about the media focus on the USG's role in the situation and the possible spillover effect it would have on the US-ROK alliance. He emphasized the ROKG's efforts to get out the message that "the USG is a wrong place to look for blame." He mentioned that DFM Shim Yoon-je had met with over 20 reporters during lunch to discuss the hostage situation and had used that opportunity to point out that the Taliban, not the U.S., held the key to resolution of the crisis, and that the USG had done everything in its power to assist the ROK and Afghan governments in their efforts to free the hostages. Acknowledging that there was only so much the USG could do to help, DG Cho nonetheless concluded the meeting by requesting all the support and cooperation that Washington can offer.

14. (C) MND DG Kim said that the ROKG is concerned that the way the hostage situation is handled and resolved presents a challenge for the bilateral relationship. Kim explained that he and other ROKG officials had spent the morning at the National Assembly, where they had stressed that the hostage situation in Afghanistan was in no way related to the U.S. and cautioned against blaming the U.S. or inflaming anti-American sentiment over the issue. He said that ROKG officials also emphasized that the U.S. was providing critical logistics and intelligence-sharing assistance. Kim noted that a few NA members were very critical of the U.S. for not helping to get the hostages back already, but that

other NA members strongly criticized that attitude, arguing instead that the U.S. was not to blame. Kim said that in his view, the majority of NA members, and ROK society were appreciative of everything the U.S. has done and would not support attempts to use the hostage situation to ignite anti-American sentiment, but admitted that a "very small" number of anti-American NGOs were aggressively pursuing that agenda. DASD Sedney thanked Kim for his, and the ROKG's, efforts to correctly portray the U.S. role to the ROK media, NA, and public, and assured the USG remained committed to resolving the hostage crisis.

15. (C) NSC's Cho said that the potential for the hostage issue to foment anti-American sentiment and damage the U.S.-ROK Alliance was significant, but noted that it could be mitigated by managing the hostage crisis well. (NOTE: The tone of this comment suggested this was a veiled threat, in contrast to the concerns expressed by MOFAT and MND. END NOTE.)

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DASD Sedney Raises New Avenues for Communication  
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16. (SBU) When MOFAT DG Cho informed Sedney that the ROK Special Envoy for the Korean hostage crisis in Afghanistan, Vice Foreign Minister Cho Jung-pyo, would be meeting with the Afghan National Security Advisor, DASD Sedney replied that he knew the National Security Advisor very well from his previous service in Afghanistan. He then assured Cho that the NSA was one of President Karzai's most trusted advisors. DASD Sedney advised both MOFAT and the NSC to contact the Pakistani government, and suggested that the NSC also contact Afghanistan's ambassadors, who might have significant tribal influence in the crisis areas.  
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